

The following is a transcript of Christie Vilsack's remarks on the Rural Libraries Initiative; video of her speech available at: [mms://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/secy/cvilsack1CAP.wmv](https://ocbmtcwmp.usda.gov/content/secy/cvilsack1CAP.wmv).

Hello I'm Christie Vilsack and it is my privilege today to tell you about a very exciting initiative at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In December 2009, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who also happens to be my husband, announced the Rural Libraries Initiative, making \$100 million in USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Loan and Grant funds available this fiscal year to support the construction, renovation, expansion, or improvement of public libraries across rural America. USDA works every day to expand economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for all rural Americans. With an array of business, utilities, housing, and community facilities programs, USDA's Rural Development Agency can help build a rural community from the ground up. And it is my strong belief that no community is complete without a vibrant public library. For 20 years I was a teacher in the small town of Mount Pleasant, Iowa. As first lady of Iowa, I visited over 500 libraries in my state and collaborated with librarians to raise awareness about the changing role of America's libraries. So I know firsthand of the many important benefits and opportunities that public libraries for rural communities. Moreover, public programming at rural public libraries provides small town residents with access to unique and diverse cultural experiences generally found nowhere else in the community. Libraries also play a vital role in bridging the digital divide between our urban and rural communities by providing computers with internet access for public use. Often times, the public library is the only place in a rural town where people can access the internet to do research for school, look for a job, or market a product or service. Over the past five years, Rural Development's investment in rural libraries has totaled nearly \$40 million. We must do more, and thanks to additional funding provided under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, we have that opportunity. But we cannot make investments in public libraries without strong partners on the ground, and that is where you come in. Whether you are a librarian, a library administrator, or a state or local government official, I urge you to consider applying

for Community Facilities financing to construct a new library, or to improve or enlarge an existing one in your community. But, how do you apply? It's easy. USDA Rural Development has a network of hundreds of area and local offices with dedicated staff who stand ready to assist at every step of the application process- from crafting a vision for your library, to completing the necessary paperwork. I'd also encourage you to contact your Rural Development State Director who can serve as a vital resource in making your public library project a reality. To find your local office connect with your State Director, and to learn more about our programs please visit www.usda.gov. Be sure to act quickly though, because Recovery Act funding must be out the door by September 30th, 2010. Today, thanks to the Recovery Act, we have a unique opportunity to dramatically expand access to public libraries across rural America, improving quality of life and increasing economic opportunity for millions of rural Americans for decades to come. We've already received an unprecedented number of applications for funding for public libraries this year, but there is still much work to be done. On behalf of Secretary Vilsack, I sincerely hope you'll take full advantage of this initiative and wish you the best of luck in your endeavors. Thank you.